

The total bankruptcy of so-called theistic evolution

Shadow of Oz: Theistic evolution and the absent god

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The author is an Assistant Professor of Biology at Waynesburg University. Rossiter appears to have had a roller-coaster experience in terms of faith. He claims to have once been a Christian, then renounced the faith, and become an atheist (p. 1). He describes his atheism as having been of a cantankerous kind (p. 3). Years later, he professedly became a Christian after experiencing a bout with near-death (p. 4).

Throughout this work, the author engages in a systematic debunking of so-called theistic evolution. He also deconstructs the positions of oft-quoted evolutionists, such as Francisco Ayala, Richard Dawkins, Karl W. Giberson, Kenneth R. Miller, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, and Howard van Till.

For purposes of this review, I compare some of the author's contentions with those found in my tale of the horse and the tractor, wherein the farmer (theistic evolutionist) is vainly trying to assign a role to the horse (God) in the movement of the tractor (evolution) (figure 1).¹ First the farmer insists that the roles of the horse and the tractor can be reconciled by having the horse pull the tractor and then, faced with the fact that the tractor runs on its own and needs no horse to move

it, insists that the horse is invisibly behind the motions of the tractor.

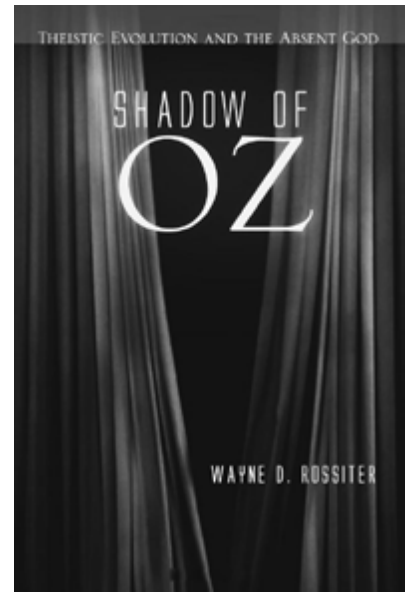
The contrived 'reconciliation' offered by so-called theistic evolution

The gist of theistic evolution is deftly summarized by Rossiter:

"So then how does the theistic evolutionist marry evolutionary processes and theism? As I have already mentioned, there are three basic ways; 1) they adjust Christian claims so that they fit snugly around an unharmed evolutionary core, 2) they create artificial firewalls between their scientific and theological beliefs, or 3) they push God into the distant and undetectable cosmic background so that the universe only looks random (but isn't). In general, the difficulty for theistic evolutionists lies in trying to make sense of 'In the beginning God created ...'. Namely, they are not able to say what 'creating' God actually did, and they are absolutely reluctant to implicate his divine hand in any particular happening with regard to life on Earth. God is an assumed ethereal backdrop, as opposed to an evidenced player in the workings of the universe" (p. 17).

Theological language aside, so-called theistic evolution is really no different from atheistic evolution. Rossiter comments:

"It's a one-sided push. Why? As we shall see, this is because theistic evolutionists are persuaded to make room in their theology for Darwin, but not room in their Darwin for theology (figure 2). ... Naturally, when the two disagree, the facts will necessarily carry the day, or the faith claims are



simply compartmentalized, and the conflict is not acknowledged" (p. 6).

In addition:

"For example, while names like Kenneth Miller and John Haught are used as evidence of the happy marriage between God and Darwin, their actual theology bears little resemblance to the Christianity they claim" (p. 9).

Clearly, the role of God in so-called theistic evolution is vague, untestable, and totally ad hoc. Rossiter writes: "The point is that theistic evolution has moved the discussion such that anything science finds out about the natural world can be interpreted as God's plan" (p. 160).

The 'God in evolution' is indistinguishable from a non-existent God. This can be illustrated by Carl Sagan's tale of the dragon in the garage (figure 3). The dragon is invisible. The dragon floats, so it cannot leave footprints. Its fire is heatless. Finally, it is incorporeal, so paint cannot stick to it (p. 57).

In a sense, theistic evolutionists want to have it both ways, and Rossiter calls it a form of intellectual dishonesty (e.g. p. 104). That is, theistic evolutionists embrace naturalistic

evolution as fact, while simultaneously denying the naturalistic implications of naturalistic evolution.

Of course, there are other implications of so-called theistic evolution. For instance, the theistic evolutionists who speak of ‘tolerance’ of different views about Genesis are not infrequently the most intolerant of all. Although Rossiter rarely gets into theology in this book, he does note the inconsistency of Christian theistic evolutionists who embrace naturalism for the first part of the Bible but not

its latter part (the miracles of Jesus Christ).

The ‘pre-scientific’ role of miracles

One common argument for the non-literalness of the Book of Genesis is the fact that it was written, by pre-scientific authors, living in a pre-scientific age, for pre-scientific readers, and for the purpose of teaching great truths. Therefore, according to the likes of Kenneth R.

Miller, the biblical teachings should be ‘updated’ to fit what is called modern science.

The foregoing argument confuses the issue, as shown by Rossiter:

“By analogy, I can tell you that it rained last Tuesday, and, while I have no training in meteorology, my claim should be consistent with reality. Perhaps the meteorologist can explain the specific details of how and why it rained, but that should only reinforce my claim, not debunk it. And this is what the theistic evolutionists are really doing. They are not just claiming that the biblical authors of antiquity were ignorant of science (as they most certainly were), but that they were wrong about reality” (p. 63).

Theistic evolutionists also circumvent Genesis through another foil. They commonly say that the role of a miracle-working God, if any, in nature is outside the realm of science. Rossiter points out that they are being a bit disingenuous, and are engaging in their own version of the God-of-gaps argument. He comments:

“It is untrue that science has nothing to say about miracles. If a man



Figure 1. Tractor and Horse



Figure 2. Theistic evolutionists are persuaded to make room in their theology for Darwin, but not room in their Darwin for theology.

is spontaneously (miraculously) healed of a deadly virus while lying on his deathbed, doctors (and scientists) can document it. He had the virus, they knew his condition, and now he doesn't. Of course we may not know why or how, but we can document and study it" (p. 79).

God, evolution, and non-miraculous events

Having rejected a miraculous origin of the whole universe, as taught in the Book of Genesis, theistic evolutionists are quick to assure us that God can work through non-miraculous events. Here, too, they are being disingenuous. Evolution is completely non-teleological. Not only does evolution have no place for miracles—it also has no place even for non-miraculous divine intentionality. Rossiter makes this very clear:

"Saying that God used evolution to create humankind (or anything in particular) is like saying that Suzie used the lottery to give her uncle a million dollars. If she did, then the lottery was clearly non-random. Evolution cannot plan, prepare for, or respond to any future events. Further, its principle [sic] driving mechanism (natural selection acting on heritable variation) can only sort organisms based on fitness in the present. Because fitness is the only metric in natural selection, evolution is rendered an amoral process that does not care *how* the fitness is achieved [emphasis in original]" (p. 44).

Taking this further, Rossiter criticizes the position taken by Joan Roughgarden, in which, among other things, God imposes natural selection on the organism:

"However, natural selection—whatever it actually is—is the product of the environment the organism finds itself in. ... What's worse about Roughgarden's argument is that it is clearly a God-of-the-gaps. She is

inserting God's intentionality and direction into a system that shows no signs of such divine activity. The evolutionary processes she affirms and espouses are precisely the same as the secular versions" (p. 51).

All of the foregoing is illustrated, in my tale of the horse and the tractor (figure 1),¹ by the following elementary fact: The tractor runs on its own without the horse, and the horse has no role of any kind in the motion of the tractor. However, if the tractor does not run, then it is futile to force the horse to pull the tractor. So, if evolution works, it does not need God, and, if it does not work, it is futile to force God to be the driving force behind evolution.

Is God hidden in the 'potentiality' of evolution?

Some theistic evolutionists have suggested that God did not create things directly, but that He endowed them with some kind of 'ability to evolve'. Rossiter demolishes this contention with the following quip:

"The argument is that God so brilliantly conceived of his creation at its inception that he didn't interact with it again. But, because of the inherent stochasticity of the universe, pointing to God's preconceived plan

in the potentiality of the universe is more like saying that my wife and I designed our child from her inception such that she would become a tea drinker at age fifty-eight" (p. 14).

Let us extend Rossiter's reasoning itself. Every single aspect of evolutionary thinking revolves around the unintentionality of the process, and that at *every* level. Thus, the 'potential to evolve' is every bit as unplanned as the evolutionary process itself. For example, if a given species escaped extinction by evolving into a novel life-form, it was not because of some built-in 'potential to evolve', any more than it was because of some predetermined plan or outcome. It was because the right mutations fortuitously happened, and because the environment fortuitously happened to be of the right kind that enabled the presumed evolutionary process to give rise to a particular novel organism.

Let us once again extend my story of the horse and the tractor.¹ Imagine the futility of the farmer saying that the horse is actually moving the tractor insofar as the horse somehow has endowed the tractor with 'the potential to move'. First of all, it would confuse the issue—which is not some vague 'potential to move', but the fact of the tractor moving, and the purported



Figure 3. Carl Sagan's dragon in the garage

role of the horse in making the tractor move. Second, it would expose the problem of the fact that there is no evidence that the horse had anything to do with the tractor having a potential to move.

Finally, and not mentioned by Rossiter, the notion that God made things with the ‘potential to evolve’ confuses the issue. It redefines ‘creation by God’ to mean something that it is not. The Bible plainly speaks of a direct creation of all things, not some kind of mystical ‘ability to create itself’.

God-of-gaps in quantum phenomena

Faced with the fact that evolutionary theory has no role for God whatsoever, some theistic evolutionists try to smuggle God into the indeterminacy of the actions of matter at the subatomic level. Rossiter brilliantly demolishes this escapade with the following:

“A few theistic evolutionists assume a different fallacious point shared by Miller. Folks like [John M.] Polkinghorne and [Stephen M.] Barr join him in positing that the God we’re searching for might be acting through quantum phenomena, which is a contradiction in terms. We’ve already demonstrated that it is easy to discern between the patterns of evidence or intentionality and random stochasticity. While they ridicule creationists for trying to use God to fill the temporary gaps in scientific knowledge, they commit precisely the same mistake. In their current stance, they have relegated God to an invisible and undetectable role on the very outskirts of the material universe (before the beginning and in the subatomic static). If those gaps are decisively filled, where will God go?” (p. 162).

Let us extend my story of the horse and the tractor.¹ One could just as easily assign the horse an invisible role,

in making the tractor move, by asserting that the horse’s actions somehow occur at the quantum level. It would be just as logical as giving God that role in evolution.

There is a further irony to this. Although Rossiter rejects Intelligent Design (ID), he chides theistic evolutionists for despising the proponents of ID, and for misrepresenting the ID position. However, those theistic evolutionists who, in Rossiter’s words, say that “God pulled the puppet strings”, at the quantum level, are, in a sense, invoking a form of ID themselves (pp. 54–55)!

‘But God cannot absolutely be ruled out’

Some theistic evolutionists, failing everything else, tell us that we cannot be certain that God is not behind the evolutionary process. However, Rossiter points out that this is like saying that, since an accused person cannot be proven to have been uninvolved in a murder, that he is therefore guilty. In a more subtle sense, it is also like saying that, since we cannot be absolutely certain that a certain random number is in fact random, we are therefore free to suppose that it was non-random.

Let us again extend my story of the horse and the tractor.¹ One could just as easily argue that the horse is causing the tractor to move, perhaps by some undefined telepathic process, because, after all, we cannot absolutely prove that the horse lacks the telepathic ability to influence the tractor.

Finally, this whole theistic evolutionist’s reasoning process is completely arbitrary, as pointedly illustrated by Rossiter:

“We don’t look at isotopic decay as a guided process. We don’t presume that God is expressing his intentionality during the diffusion of ions in solution, Brownian motion, or even the timing and choosing of rock particles lost to erosion. As we’ve seen before, special mental

gymnastics are applied by theistic evolutionists to evolutionary theory alone. Publicly entering the fray to defend the view that Brownian motion is directed by God is apparently not a hill worth dying for” (p. 93).

Circular reasoning in evolutionary storytelling

This book is not solely about so-called theistic evolution. It also includes a valuable critique of some of the premises of organic evolution.

Wayne D. Rossiter delves into the hidden circle of assumptions behind the standard evolspeak, as, for example, concerning the emergence of animals to fill ecological niches:

“Which came first, the niche or the organism’s ecology? That is, are niches defined as opportunities lying in wait for animals to adapt to fill them, or are niches things that define the organisms themselves?” (p. 136).

He continues:

“How do we know if there’s a selective pressure (or even what it is)? By the adaptive response. What’s an adaptation? A response to a selective pressure. The recurring problem of circularity just keeps rearing its head” (p. 136).

Conclusions

Theistic evolution is a grand failure. It is internally inconsistent—and that at several different levels. It borders on intellectual dishonesty—again at several levels.

The facts are clear: the biblical God and evolution are fundamentally incompatible.

References

1. Woodmorappe, J., The horse and the tractor, *Creation* 22(4):53, 2000; creation.com/horsetractor.